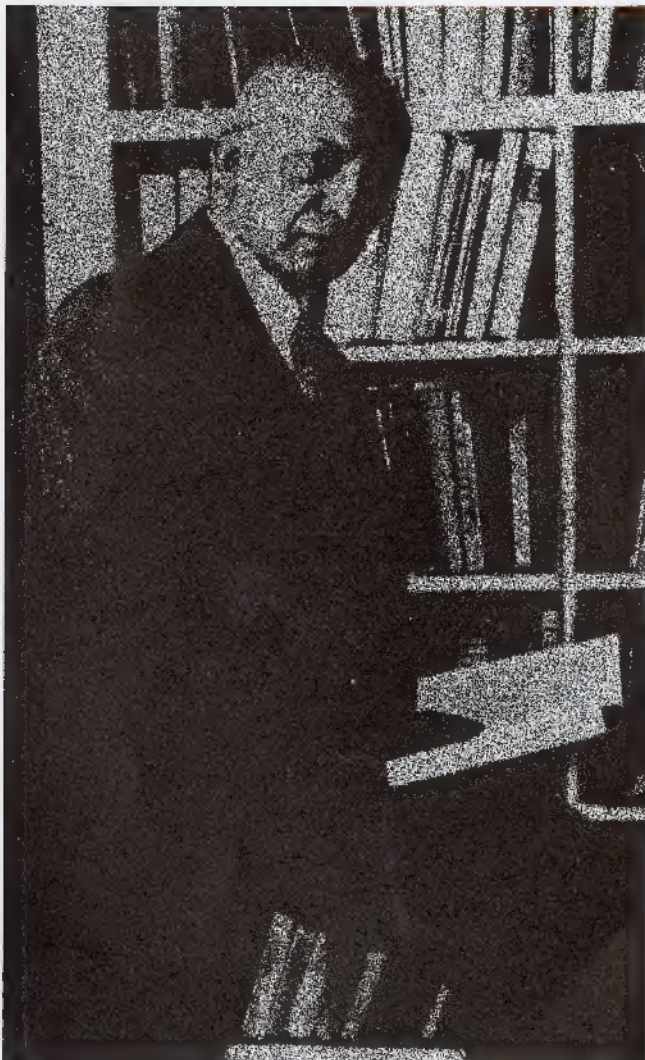




A Study Guide for Teachers

CARTER G. WOODSON FOUNDATION

Carter G. Woodson: Black History Pioneer



Carter G. Woodson is not a household name; yet he was one of the leading Black pride and Black liberation activists of the twentieth century. He did not call for a violent overthrow of the government, or for Black people to battle white oppression one-on-one with guns and knives. Carter G. Woodson called for a revolution of the mind. He fought for the dignity of his people with the tools of scholarship and the power of the pen: he made people sit up and take notice of the history and achievements of Black people. So great were his deeds that he became known as the "Father of Negro History."

Carter Godwin Woodson, the son of former slaves, was born on December 19, 1875 in New Canton, Virginia. He was the oldest of nine children and his family was so poor that as a boy he worked in the coal mines to help support them. Neither poverty nor the outrageous racism of the times, however, destroyed his thirst for knowledge. In his early years he had very little formal schooling and was, by and large, his own teacher—and a very capable one at that. For when in his late teens he was finally able to attend high school he managed to graduate in a year and a half. Woodson went on to get his B.L. from Berea College in Kentucky, his B.A. and M.A. from the University of Chicago, and finally, his Ph.D in history from Harvard University.

At various points in his educational journey Woodson worked as an educator himself in high schools in West Virginia, Washington, and even in the Philippines. These positions along with his education would prepare him for the teaching and administrative posts he would later hold at Howard University and West Virginia Collegiate Institute.

Carter G. Woodson was, indeed, a very educated man. But perhaps the most important thing he learned from his studies and teaching experiences was just how much of Black history had been ignored and how much of what had been recorded was lies. This discovery filled Woodson with anger and righteous

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indignation because he realized that a people who do not know who they are or where they come from cannot advance in life. He also realized that if non-Black people believed Black people had no history they would continue to look upon them as inferiors. And so, Woodson devoted his life to researching and promoting the study of Black history and culture.

In 1915 Woodson co-founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History in Washington, D.C.). The organization's purpose was, as Woodson put it, "the collection of sociological and historical data on the Negro, the study of peoples of African blood, the publishing of books in the field, and the promoting of harmony between the races by acquainting the one with the other."¹ The creation of the Association laid the foundation for the treatment of Black history as a serious subject. As the Association's driving force, Woodson started two publications: the scholarly *Journal of Negro History* (1916) and a magazine for students, *Negro History Bulletin* (1937). In 1921 he organized Associated Publishers to publish books and materials on Black history that white publishers would not print.

In his role as an historian, in addition to writing numerous articles, Woodson authored and edited some twenty books, among them: *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861* (1915); *Negro Makers of History* (1928); *African Myths, Together with Proverbs, A Supplementary Reader Composed of Folk Tales from Various Parts of Africa* (1928); *The African Background Outlined; or, Handbook for the Study of the Negro* (1936); *African Heroes and Heroines* (1939). The books he is most remembered for are *The History of the Negro Church* (1921), the first in-depth account of the history and significance of this major religious and social institution; *The Negro in Our History* (1922), which was for years a widely used textbook in high schools and colleges where Black history was taught; and lastly, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (1933), a landmark study of the education of Black people and the problems in American education.

One of the most important parts of Woodson's legacy is Negro History Week—the forerunner of Black History Month. Woodson launched this annual celebration in 1926 as a way to raise both educated and non-educated people's awareness of Black people's contributions to civilization. He chose February because it was the month in which Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln were born—two men who had played key roles in the abolition of slavery.

Carter G. Woodson was not the only person in his day to wage a war on ignorance and distortion of Black history, but he was one of its fiercest and most tireless generals. He paid more than lip service to his heritage. He gave of himself. When he died on April 3, 1950 his life's work lived on. It lives on in the ever-growing number of books about the history and heritage of his people, in the existence of Black Studies courses and departments in schools across the nation, and it lives on in the activities surrounding Black History Month that pay tribute to the past and present achievements of people of African descent.

¹"Ten Years of Collecting and Publishing the Records of the Negro," *Journal of Negro History*, October, 1925: p. 598.

CARTER G. WOODSON IN HIS OWN WORDS

"Some Things Negroes Need To Do"

...Negroes should read some things written by their own people that they may be inspired thereby. You will never be a George Washington or a Thomas Jefferson—you will never be a white man—but you will be a Negro, and we must realize that there are certain things in the Negro race worth developing. Those things may be worth as much to the world as the things of the white race when they are properly developed. We must cease trying to straighten our hair and bleach our faces, and be Negroes—and be good ones.

In this literature you will get the inspiration you need to be like Frederick Douglass, Booker Washington, S. Coleridge-Taylor, or Paul Laurence Dunbar. If you can contribute to the world what those men have you will have no reason to regret that you cannot be a George Washington or a Thomas Jefferson, because you will still be identified with some of the greatest men who have ever appeared in the history of the world.

We have a wonderful history behind us. We of the Journal of Negro History shall have going the rounds soon a lecture on the ante-bellum period, setting forth stories of Negroes who did so much to inspire us. It reads like the history of people in an heroic age. We expect to send out from time to time books written for the express purpose of showing you that you have a history, a record, behind you. If you are unable to demonstrate to the world that you have this record, the world will say to you, "You are not worthy to enjoy the blessings of democracy or anything else." They will say to you, "Who are you, anyway? Your ancestors have never controlled empires or kingdoms and most of your race have contributed little or nothing to science and philosophy and mathematics." So far as you know, they have not; but if you will read the history of Africa, the history of your ancestors—people of whom you should feel proud—you will realize that they have a history that is worthwhile. They have traditions that have value of which you can boast....

Let us, then, study this history, and study it with the understanding that we are not, after all, an inferior people, but simply a people who have been set back, a people whose progress has been impeded. We are going back to that beautiful history and it is going to inspire us to greater achievements.

Southern Workman, January 1922

"The Miseducation of the Negro"

All things being equal, however, there should be no different method of approach or appeal to Negro students that cannot be made just as well by a white teacher to Negro students or a Negro teacher to white students, if such teachers are properly informed and have the human attitude; but tradition, race hate, and terrorism have made such a thing impossible. However, I am not an advocate of segregation, I do not believe in separate schools. I am merely emphasizing the necessity for common-sense schools and teachers who understand and continue in sympathy with those whom they instruct.

Those who take the position to the contrary have the idea that education is merely a process of imparting information... For me, education means to inspire people to live more abundantly, to learn to begin with life as they find it and make it better.

... The thing needed is reform. Negro institutions of learning and those of whites, too, especially those white institutions which are training teachers who have to deal with large numbers of Negroes, should reconstruct their curricula. These institutions should abandon a large portion of the traditional courses which have been retained throughout the years because they are supposedly cultural, and they should offer instead training in things which are also cultural and at the same time have a bearing on the life of the people thus taught. Certainly the Negro should learn something about the history and culture of the white man with whom he has to deal daily, and the white man should likewise learn the same about the Negro; but if the education of either is made a one-sided effort neither one will understand or appreciate the other, and interracial cooperation will be impossible.

Looking over the recent catalogues of the leading Negro colleges, I find their courses drawn up without much thought about the Negro. Invariably these institutions give courses in ancient, mediaeval, and modern Europe, but they do not offer courses in ancient, mediaeval, and modern Africa. Yet Africa, according to recent discoveries, has contributed about as much to the progress of mankind as Europe has, and the early civilization of the Mediterranean world was decidedly influenced by the so-called Dark Continent.

A further examination of the curricula of Negro colleges shows, too, that as a rule they offer courses in Greek philosophy and in modern European thought, but direct no attention to the philosophy of the Negro. Negroes have and always have had their own ideas about purpose, chance, time, and space, about appearance and reality, and about freedom and necessity. The effort of the Negro to interpret man's relation to the universe shows just as much intelligence as we find in the philosophy of the Greeks. There were many Africans who were just as wise as Socrates.



Again I find in some of these catalogues numerous courses in art, but no well defined course in Negro or African art. The art of Africa, however, influenced the art of the Greeks to the extent that thinkers are now saying that the most ancient culture of the Mediterranean was chiefly African. Most of these colleges, too, do not even direct special attention to Negro music in which the race has made an outstanding contribution in America.

The unreasonable attitude is that because whites do not have these things in their schools the Negroes must not have them in theirs....

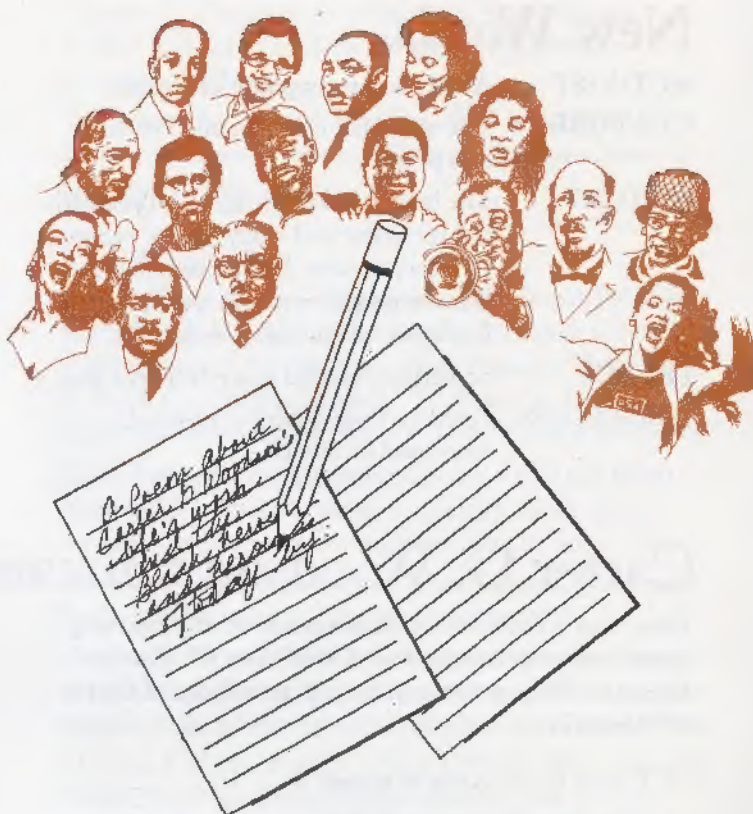
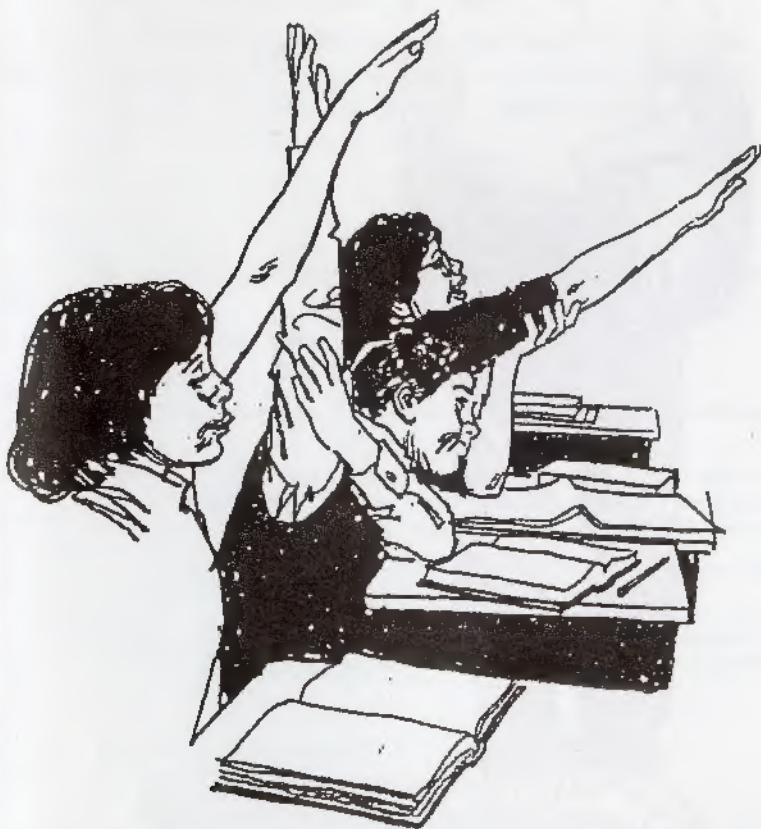
The higher education of the Negro, then, has been largely meaningless imitation. When the Negro finishes his course in one of our schools, he knows what others have done, but he has not been inspired to do much for himself. If he makes a success in life it comes largely by accident.

Class Discussion

Explain to your students that Carter G. Woodson is considered a pioneer in the area of Black History because he was among the leading promoters of the serious study of Black life and culture and one of the most dedicated scholars in the field.

Thoroughly review with your class the excerpts from the articles "Some Things Negroes Need To Do" and "The Miseducation of the Negro," making sure to put them in the context of the times in which they were written. Then have a class discussion on Woodson's life's work and his ideas by posing such questions as:

- What do you think of what Woodson had to say?
- What do you think Carter G. Woodson would have to say about the state of Black history today? Explain your answer.
- How much Black history have you learned in school and how do you feel about this?
- How much Black history have you learned at home and how do you feel about this?
- How important is Black history to you? Not at all? Somewhat? Very? Explain your answer.
- How can people truly honor Woodson's legacy?



Follow-up Activities

1. Have each student write a poem about Carter G. Woodson's life's work.
2. After briefly discussing with your students the achievements of more familiar Black activists such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr., have them do research on a lesser known Black hero or heroine of the past and prepare an oral report for an upcoming session. Possible profile subjects include:

Richard Allen	Marcus Garvey
Ida B. Wells Barnett	Francis J. Grimké
Mary McLeod Bethune	Fannie Lou Hamer
Nannie Helen Burroughs	Frances E. W. Harper
Anna Julia Cooper	A. Philip Randolph
Alexander Crummel	Arthur A. Schomburg
Paul Cuffee	Mary Ann Shadd (Cary)
Martin R. Delany	Maria W. Stewart
W.E.B. Du Bois	Mary Church Terrell
Charlotte L. Forten	David Walker
Henry Highland Garnet	

3. Have a brainstorming session with your class on Black heroes and heroines of today. Have your students bring in articles (with or without photographs) from newspapers and magazines on these people as well as others who are making positive contributions to the betterment of their people and society as a whole. Then have them as a group or individually make a "Living Legends" collage.

New Words

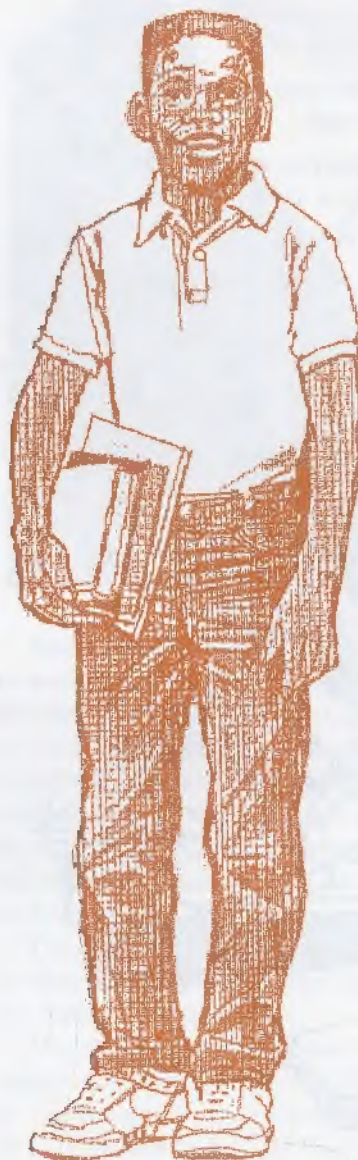
ACTIVIST	A very active supporter of a cause.
CULTURE	The art, skills, customs, and beliefs of a people.
HISTORY	The branch of knowledge that deals with the recording and study of past events; the story of what has happened in the life of a people or nation. An historian is a writer or authority on history.
LEGACY	Something handed down from the past.
LIBERATION	Freedom from slavery—physical, emotional or mental.

MISEDUCATE	To educate improperly.
NEGRO	A member of the race of people from Africa south of the Sahara Desert. In the 1960s "Black" became the preferred term; in recent times, many Black Americans have come to prefer "African-American".
RESEARCH	Careful study and collection of information in some field of knowledge
SCHOLAR	A learned person; one who has done advanced study in a special field.

Carter G. Woodson Education Project Post Test

Have your students write their answers to the following questions at the completion of the Carter G. Woodson Education Project to measure their knowledge of Carter G. Woodson.

1. Carter G. Woodson is known as _____.
2. What was his mission in life?
3. Why did he do what he did?
4. Name and describe three things he started.
5. Name two of his most important books.
6. Why is it said that the pen is mightier than the sword?
7. Why is it important for Black people to know their history and culture?
8. Why is it important for non-Black people to know about Black history and culture?
9. How has your knowledge about Carter G. Woodson affected your thoughts about Black History.
10. How has your knowledge about Carter G. Woodson affected your thoughts about your own education.



New Books



The following may be helpful resources:

On Carter G. Woodson

"The Father of Negro History" by Agnes Behling. *Negro Digest* (November 1962)

"Carter Godwin Woodson" by W. Montague Cobb. *Negro History Bulletin* (November 1973)

"A Portrait of Carter G. Woodson" by W.E.B. Du Bois. *Masses and Mainstream* (June 1950)

"The New Negro History" by John Hope Franklin. *Crisis* (February 1957); reprinted in *Race and History: Selected Essays, 1938-1988* by John Hope Franklin (Louisiana State University Press, 1989)

"Carter G. Woodson: The Father of Negro History," by Earl E. Thorpe in *Black Historians, A Critique* (Morrow, 1971)

Working with Carter G. Woodson, the Father of Black History by Lorenzo Johnston Greene, Louisiana State University Press, 1989)

On Black History

Empak "Black History" Publication Series (Empak Publishing Co., Chicago IL). Series titles include: "A Salute to Historic Black Women," "A Salute to Black Pioneers," "A Salute to Black Civil Rights Leaders," "A Salute to Historic Black Abolitionists," "A Salute to Historic Black Educators."

Black Americans of Achievement, Series 1 & 2 (75 titles) Nathan Irvin Huggins, senior consulting series editor; introductory essays by Coretta Scott King (Chelsea House). *Black History for Beginners* by Denise Dennis; illustrated by Susan Willmarth (Writers & Readers, 1984).

A Pictorial History of Black Americans (5th revised edition of *A Pictorial History of the Negro in America*) by Langston Hughes, Milton Meltzer, and C. Eric Lincoln (Crown, 1983)

I Dream A World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America photographs and interviews by Brian Lanker; edited by Barbara Summers; foreword by Maya Angelou (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1989)

One More River To Cross; The Stories of Twelve Black Americans by Jim Haskins (Scholastic, 1992)

Your History: From The Beginning Of Time to the Present by J.A. Rogers (Pittsburgh Courier Publishing Co., 1940; reprint Black Classic Press, 1983)

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Designed by: Carol T. Jenkins

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The Carter G. Woodson Foundation is a multi-disciplinary arts institution that organizes and produces the OnStage In New Jersey Performance Series, Black Culture On Tour In America, and the Artists-In-The-Schools Program.

The Mission of the Woodson Foundation is to research, preserve, perpetuate and celebrate the creative expressions, the cultural heritage, and the historic achievements of African-Americans through performances, exhibits and educational activities.